**Cliques**

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The term clique has two levels of significance. In its neutral usage by social researchers, it denotes a group of people who interact with each other more intensively than with other peers in the same setting. In its more popular form it has negative connotations. It is used to describe an adolescent social group that excludes others on the basis of superficial differences, exercising greater than average amount of peer pressure upon its members. The numerous terms teenagers use to describe themselves and others-such as jocks, druggies, populars, brains, nerds, normals, rappers, preps, stoners, rockers, punks (punx), freaks (phreaks), and skaters-exemplify both levels of meaning in the word "clique." These terms both accurately refer to the activities or qualities the group members share as well as to the exclusiveness of the groups.

A clique consists of a particular group of people within a particular location. Cliques are characterized by a pattern of relationships in which each member is either directly or indirectly connected with every other member, and in each pair relationship the members exchange social overtures (phone calls, get-togethers, etc.) on a fairly equal basis. Joining cliques, having the desire to join a particular clique, and being excluded from cliques are considered a normal part of adolescent development. Joining cliques helps children to develop, identify, and regulate social interaction. Generally children begin to be more aware of differences and form cliques in late elementary school, between the ages of 8 and 10 years old. As they begin to separate emotionally from their parents, young adolescents' identification with their peers is greatly exaggerated between ages 10 and 12 years old, when a child's clique may change on a daily basis.

The issue of belonging is extremely important during middle school and high school, and membership in cliques can have a strong effect on the adolescent's sense of self-worth. During high school, cliques become more consistent, though their composition may change. Research shows that the way an adolescent or teen behaves is better predicted by the behavior of cliques in which he is a part than by the behavior of individual friends.

Most cliques are fairly complex and have a mixture of positive and negative qualities. Cliques may be judged according to the degree to which they exert positive or negative peer pressure, accept diversity among members, and appreciate individuality. Even if a group exerts positive peer pressure, it may also be exerting negative peer pressure by being exclusive on the basis of race, class, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.

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